

October 25, 2022

Honorable Patty Murray  
Chairwoman, Senate Committee on  
Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on  
Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions  
217 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Burr,

As child advocates, researchers, and industry leaders, we are writing to you today to urge the Senate HELP committee to include S.971, the Children and Media Research Advancement Act (CAMRA) in a mental health legislative package this year. CAMRA would fund overdue longitudinal research through the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to study how technology use affects children's and teen's development.

Since the start of the pandemic, depression and anxiety have skyrocketed in America's youth, with research showing nearly 25% of young people report experiencing depressive symptoms and 20% report experiencing anxiety symptoms.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, while a spike in anxiety and depression for adults during the initial months of the pandemic abated within a year, young people are still struggling today. In early 2021, emergency department visits in the U.S. for suspected suicide attempts were 51% higher for adolescent girls and 4% higher for adolescent boys compared to the same time period in early 2019.<sup>2</sup> While it is difficult to pinpoint the exact causes of this trend in declining mental health among young people, one thing is clear: **technology plays a role.**

In his advisory on the youth mental health crisis, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy wrote, "young people are bombarded with messages through the media and popular culture that erode their sense of self-worth."<sup>3</sup> It is true that platforms can sometimes glorify and promote messages of self-harm, body dysmorphia, suicidal ideation, and addiction. However, platforms can also be vehicles for meaningful connection and creativity, and can provide access to telemedicine services and valuable information.<sup>4</sup> The less we know about how technology impacts our youth and their development, the less equipped we are to deal with the root causes of poor mental health in our young people. **And that is dangerous.**

Among researchers and pediatricians there is consensus on the need for greater support for research that seeks to understand exactly how technology impacts the current kids and teens'

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<sup>1</sup> [Protecting Youth Mental Health: The Surgeon General's Advisory](#). (2021), 9;

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 3.

<sup>4</sup> Garfin, DR. (Oct 2020). "[Technology as a coping tool during the coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) pandemic: Implications and recommendations](#)." *Stress Health*. 36(4):555-559. doi: 10.1002/smi.2975.

mental health crisis.<sup>5</sup> We need a more nuanced understanding of the psychology of media with updated methodologies, which requires dedicated federal funding for research. The House has already taken a step in the right direction by passing CAMRA within the Restoring Hope for Mental Health and Well-Being Act of 2022. **It is time the Senate does the same.** America's children can't wait.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill and for your efforts to prioritize the mental health of our youth.

Sincerely,

Alaska Children's Trust  
Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development  
Common Sense Media  
Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children's Hospital  
Dar Meshi, PhD, Assistant Professor at Michigan State University  
Eva Telzer, PhD, Psychology & Neuroscience Department, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill  
Fairplay  
Family Online Safety Institute  
Jenny Radesky, PhD, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, University of Michigan Medical School  
Joan Ganz Cooney Center  
The LEGO Group  
Massachusetts Association for Mental Health  
Mayor Libby Schaaf, City of Oakland  
National Center on Sexual Exploitation  
#OaklandUndivided  
Prameela Boorada, Mental Health Advocate  
Sesame Workshop  
Stephen Henshaw, PhD, Distinguished Professor of Psychology, University of California, Berkeley  
UNICEF USA  
Voices for Utah Children

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<sup>5</sup> Burke, Lilah. (2022), "[What Role Does Social Media Play in the Youth Mental Health Crisis? Researchers Are Trying to Find Out.](#)" *EdSurge*.